

APPENDIX B

PARK AND RECREATION ISSUES SURVEY

METHODOLOGY

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Identifying Critical Outdoor Recreation Issues

The President's Commission on Americans Outdoors, an advisory commission charged with reviewing outdoor recreation, called on states to establish outdoor commissions that would examine outdoor recreational needs, opportunities, and problems. North Carolina was one of 32 states that responded by establishing commissions or holding governor's forums and conferences.

The Governor's Conference on Americans Outdoors focused on two basic questions: What will the next generation of Americans want to do outdoors? And how can we be sure they have appropriate opportunities? In addition, the Conference identified trends and issues in parks and recreation in North Carolina and ways to address these issues.

Speakers from the public, private nonprofit, and commercial sectors approached the issues from their individual and collective perspectives. In addition to holding panel discussions on the current and future status of parks and recreation in North Carolina, the 150 conference participants broke into six groups to discuss the following topics:

1. Legislative initiatives;
2. The state's two-year action plan;
3. New ideas and strategies;
4. Citizen involvement – volunteers and constituencies;
5. Outdoor recreation for everyone; and
6. Financing for the future.

In discussing the recreational needs of future generations, the Governor's Conference identified several issues of concern:

- The need for permanent and stable funding sources for the total spectrum of parks and recreation in North Carolina and the nation;
- Making leisure services and facilities available to all North Carolinians and visitors, including the aging and physically handicapped;
- Preserving our dwindling and non-replaceable natural and cultural resources;
- Enhancing and maintaining the quality of life;
- Encouraging more cooperation between all providers of parks and recreation leisure services across North Carolina;
- Establishing a concerted partnership among the commercial, private nonprofit, and public providers in cooperation with university system educators and research facilities;

- Marketing the services and benefits of parks and recreation statewide;
- Ensuring a continuing assessment of the leisure services, both natural and cultural, by creating an officially recognized body to carry out and advise the state regarding that assessment; and
- Increasing the use of volunteer programs to offset personnel shortages.

Major interest groups were also consulted for their perspectives on providing outdoor recreational opportunities. The Office for Independent Living emphasized accessibility issues that need to be addressed in order to eliminate physical and architectural barriers. The Commission on Indian Affairs focused on eliminating attitudinal barriers in providing greater public access to recreation areas and programs. The Division of Aging provided data on the in-migration of retirees into North Carolina and pinpointed the need for continual assessment of demographic changes to meet public demand.

Discussions with conservationists in the Friends of State Parks organization centered around the need for the state to not only expand its protection of important natural resources from degradation and overuse, but also to provide for an increasing diversity of outdoor recreational uses in appropriate settings. Friends of State Parks thought that more interpretation and education programs would inspire appreciation of our natural heritage and lessen depreciative behavior occurring in parks. Conservationists and recreationists alike expressed concern over dwindling open space for recreational use.

Recreation professionals from the North Carolina Recreation and Parks Society concurred with conservationists that more recreation programs and facilities are needed. In addition, deterioration of recreational parks and facilities, often impractical to renovate and impossible to replace due to lack of available funds, restricts full use because of safety and liability concerns. To make strides in providing services to meet public demand in this period of retrenchment, recreationists focused on greater coordination among public agencies providing recreation and cooperation with private sector enterprise to expand park and recreation opportunities.

From these varied sources and also from staff within the Division of Parks and Recreation, an outdoor recreational issues survey was compiled and sent out to individuals representing the spectrum of outdoor recreationists. The survey contained 19 issue statements for respondents to rank in order of importance. To broaden the opportunity for public input, the survey also asked for written opinions of the most critical outdoor park and recreation issues as well as recommendations for actions needed to address these issues. Survey respondents' recommendations were discussed in Chapter I.

DEVELOPMENT AND DISTRIBUTION

The project began with an assessment of the type of information that would be of value to the profession, as well as being useful in the division's current update of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

The goal was to develop a questionnaire that was comprehensive in its consideration of issues affecting outdoor recreation, yet brief and easy to complete, to elicit compliance from the recipients. Initial determination of the issues was shaped by the Governor's Conference on Americans Outdoors and California's 1987 Survey of Local Park and Recreation Agencies. Participation in defining the issues by the N. C. Recreation and Park Society, the Friends of State Parks, the N. C. Division of Aging, the Commission on Indian Affairs, and the Office For Independent Living, assured that the issues were relevant to the spectrum of recreation agencies or providers and to recreationists themselves.

The questionnaire encompassed these two areas of inquiry:

1. The respondent's judgment as to the most critical outdoor park and recreation issues over the next five years.
2. The respondent's recommendations for the most important actions needed to resolve the problems represented by these issues.

Questionnaires were sent to 360 individuals representing the spectrum of outdoor recreation planners, providers, and participants: local recreation and park directors; recreation user groups; conservation organizations; business and tourism leaders; state and federal agencies providing recreation services; Council of Government planners; county managers; citizen advisory boards for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources; special interest groups for the aging and the physically challenged; and colleges and universities with recreation curriculums.

SURVEY RESPONSE

Approximately 65 percent of the original sample of 360 or 233 persons responded to the initial and follow-up mailings. Local and county government officials represented the great majority of respondents, providing 61 percent of the total input. Citizen advisory boards, special population interest groups, academia, and regional planners comprised the second highest category with 14 percent of the respondents. State and federal officials, recreation user groups, conservation organizations, and business and tourism leaders follow respectively in percentage of respondents. Table B-1 reflects the breakdown of survey respondents by category.

DATA ANALYSIS

Each respondent identified the ten most important park and recreation issues facing North Carolina in the next five years in priority order (1-10). To calculate the final rank order of the issues for all respondents, a three-step process was used.

1. For each issue, the total of first place, second place....tenth place votes were summed for all respondents.
2. For each issue, the total number of responses at each priority level (e.g. 1st, 4th) was multiplied by a point value that reflected its relative importance. As indicated below, each level of priority was weighted as two-thirds that of the preceding one.

1st priority - 100.0 points	6th priority - 13.2 points
2nd priority - 66.7 points	7th priority - 8.8 points
3rd priority - 44.5 points	8th priority - 5.9 points
4th priority - 29.6 points	9th priority - 3.9 points
5th priority - 19.8 points	10th priority - 2.6 points

The total point score for each issue was calculated by summing all individual scores for each issue.

3. The total point score for each issue was divided by the total number of respondents to obtain its average score. See the Average Score column in Table B-2.
4. To present the relative importance of each issue, the average point score was converted to a 100 point index scale. The issue with the most points was given an index score of 100 points. Each issue scoring fewer total points scored proportionately lower on the 100 point scale. See the Index Score column in Table B-2. This final index scoring allowed a direct comparison of the relative intensity of support for all issues, or their priority. For example, it enables an equitable comparison between an issue about which a few felt keenly and a second one about which a larger number felt less intensely.

Table B-1. Percentage of Respondent Groups

GROUP	PERCENTAGE
Local & County Recreation Departments	60.7
Citizen Boards, Special Interest Groups, Planners, Academia	13.7
State and Federal Officials	7.7
Recreation Groups	7.3
Conservation Organizations	5.5
Business and Tourism Leaders	4.7

Ranking Issues

How the Park and Recreation Issues Survey respondents ranked the SCORP issues is presented in Table B-2. The top concerns of survey respondents were:

- funding and staffing for parks and recreation;
- natural resource protection;
- public awareness of outdoor recreation' s benefits; and
- the need for more recreational programs and facilities.

Table B-2. Park and Recreation Survey/Priority Ranking of Issues

RANK	ISSUE	INDEX SCORE
1	Inadequate public funding for parks, facilities, & recreation programs.	100
2	Need to ensure adequate staffing at parks & recreation facilities.	53
3	Need to expand protection of important natural resources.	51
4	Deterioration of natural resources in public parks due to overuse.	36
5	Improve public understanding of individual & economic benefits of parks & recreation.	31
6	Dwindling open space for recreational use.	30
7	Deteriorating recreational & park facilities (e.g., playground equipment, community centers, restrooms, etc).	30
8	Need to keep parks safe and clean for public use.	29
9	Natural resource degradation in an increasingly urbanized & developed state.	28
10	Need to provide more recreational programs and facilities for recreational uses.	24
11	Need to keep pace with changing demographics & changing public demands.	21
12	Provide for the increasing diversity of outdoor recreation uses in appropriate settings.	20
13	Increasing insurance liability costs, with pressure to limit or shut down recreational activities & facilities.	19
14	Encourage cooperation with private enterprise to expand park & rec. opportunities.	18
15	Establish greater coordination among public agencies providing recreation.	17
16	Vandalism and other undesirable activities occurring at parks.	16
17	Expand public access to recreation areas & programs by eliminating physical, architectural, & attitudinal barriers.	12
18	Provide interpretation/education programs.	9
19	Increasing reliance upon volunteers & community groups to operate recreation facilities/programs.	7